

The nature of dalit
literature and "the life
we live" by arun
kamble



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Dalit literature, to which "The Life We Live" belongs, is essentially a type of Indian literature that voices the angst of the subaltern in India. The works of Dalit Literature are known for their stark portrayal of reality. They depart from the romantic notions of what life is and tell things in a realistic light. Dalit Literature is often compared to slave narratives. Its origin lies in the exploitation and consequent persecution of Dalits in the Indian terrain. Dalit literature is most often seen through the mechanism of protest literature, since it shares a lot of characteristics with protest literature. It is essentially a post-independent literary phenomenon that is used as a tool of social activism for elevating the position of Dalits in the society. This literature emanates from the margins. It answers the question, "Can the subaltern speak?", and the answer seems to be a defiant yes.

Moreover, Dalit literature invokes violent and disturbing imagery, foregrounding the texts in real narratives. This literature allows space for self-reflection of Non-Dalits over their treatment of the marginalised. This kind of literature goes hand in hand with social activism, formulating resistance against the oppression of the dominant classes. Dalit literature is hence filled with slang and casual language, which helps Dalit writers portray the quotidian lives and struggles of Dalits. It doesn't glorify or romanticise reality, but is a projection of the subversive capacity of the community.

One work that stands out in the canon of Dalit literature is Arun Kamble's "The Life We Live". This is a work that expresses the reality of Dalit lives and juxtaposes it with that of the lives of the "savarna". It has an overriding tone of dissent, and activism is deeply rooted in this work. It is essentially a justification of the literatures from the margins, and follows the process of <https://assignbuster.com/the-nature-of-dalit-literature-and-the-life-we-live-by-arun-kamble/>

actively writing back to the centre. This work records the stark disparity between the lives of Dalits and upper caste people.

THE POEM (Excerpt)

If you were to live the life we live

Then out of you would poems arise.

We: kicked and spat at for our piece of bread.

You: fetch fulfillment and name of the Lord.

We: down-gutter degraders of our heritage.

You: its sole repository, descendants of the sage.

We: never have a paisa to scratch our arse.

You: the golden cup of offerings in your bank.

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It is very clear from the first look at the poem that there is an underlying anger and resentment in the poet. He essentially brings together elements from the lives of Dalits as well as " Savarnas", detailing the stark disparity in the lives they lead. This poetry uses a mode of subversion by reversing the power hierarchy in the end. In the beginning, the poet says, " If you were to live the life we live/ Then out of you would poems arise.", talking about the fact that the very act of writing is a form of protest. The poems of the people from the Dalit community are a manifestation of an inner angst that is latent,

and often untapped. These are pain narratives that help the community speak out as an act of defiance and counter the master narrative with their realistic portrayal of the oppression of Dalits." "Out of you would poems arise" is an indication that their literature is a product of a legacy of oppression.

The poet talks about how Dalits have no access to a prosperous life, and their path to happiness is hindered by constant oppression. In fact, "Your bodies flame in sandalwood/ Ours are shoved under half-turned sand." is an indication that even in death Dalits have no peace and they are not even given a decent burial, whereas the "Savarnas" lead privileged lives.

The idea of reversal of roles in the end is a radical notion. The fact that the poet says, "Wouldn't the world change, and fast/ If you were forced to live at last/ This life that's all we've always had?" shows the extent of pain his community has suffered, a pain that has been registered in their collective memory. By saying so, the poet actively challenges and outright condemns the fallacy of caste segregation by suggesting a change in the dominant social order as an act of justice. Hence, by saying so, the poet brings out the activist themes in the poem.